

Gender, race and religion: intersections and challenges

Solomos, John; Bulmer, Martin

Postprint / Postprint

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

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Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Solomos, J., & Bulmer, M. (2009). Gender, race and religion: intersections and challenges. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 32(2), 215-217. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870802632124>

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Leibniz-Gemeinschaft



Gender, Race and Religion: Intersections and Challenges

Journal:	<i>Ethnic and Racial Studies</i>
Manuscript ID:	RERS-2008-0293
Manuscript Type:	Original Manuscript
Keywords:	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6



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Introduction

Gender, Race and Religion: Intersections and Challenges

Martin Bulmer and John Solomos

In this themed issue of *Ethnic and Racial Studies* we have brought together a selection of papers that address the intersections between gender relations, race and religion in our contemporary environment. Although written from the perspective of quite different national social and political situations, they are linked by a common concern to analyse from both a conceptual and a policy angle the interface between gender and other situated social relationships. As with the other themed issues we are producing during 2009 we make no assumption that the various papers included here speak with one voice. Rather we bring them together as a way to highlight the diverse conceptual and methodological challenges that need to be addressed when we explore the complexities of how race and ethnicity intersect with other social relations.

The issue of intersectionality is highlighted in the first paper by Anna Korteweg and Gökçe Yurdakul, which takes up the issue of how we can make sense of the phenomenon of honour killing in the Netherlands and Germany. This is a phenomenon that has attracted attention in both academic and public discourses in both countries and has led to intense debate within academic and public policy circles (Wikan, 2008; Buruma, 2006). Korteweg’s and Gökçe’s account represents a critical attempt to provide some insight

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3 into the complex range of processes that shape the question of honour killing and the
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5 social and political responses to this phenomenon.
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9 The following two papers look at the intersections of race, racialisation and gender in two
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11 rather different social environments. The paper by Judith McDonnell and Cileinne de
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13 Lourenço draws on interviews with immigrant women from Brazil living in the Boston
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15 area to explore their experiences of race, gender and ethnicity. The 30 face to face
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17 interviews on which this paper draws are a valuable empirically focused account of the
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19 interplay between race, ethnicity and gender in the construction of racialised and national
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21 identities. They also help to highlight the often complicated ways in which ideas of race
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23 and gender intersect in shaping patterns of racialisation. The paper by Gabriela Sandoval
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25 concerns itself with the ways in which tobacco production in the Dominican Republic is
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27 deeply imbued by the racialised and gendered structures that have developed over the
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29 history of the republic. Sandoval's paper is concerned on the surface with the production
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31 of cigars to be consumed as a commodity; an industry with a long history in the
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33 Dominican Republic. She argues forcefully, however, that it is important to move beyond
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35 appearances and explore the 'significance of racial, political and gendered symbolism
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37 that is inscribed into tobacco'.
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45 The interplay between religion and discourses of gender equality is the focus of the next
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47 paper by Claudia Diehl, Mathias Koenig and Kerstin Rucksdeschel. Utilising research in
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49 Germany among Turkish migrants and majority Germans the authors seek to explore the
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51 ways in which religiosity both shapes and is in turn shaped by questions of gender and
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53 ethnicity. Diehl *et al's* account suggests that attitudes to gender equality both immigrant
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55 minorities and majority populations cannot be read through the lens of religion in any
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simple fashion. Rather they suggest that attitudes to gender equality need to be seen as the product of intersections between individual religiosity and wider social and cultural transformations.

Following on from this account is the paper by Diana Van Bergen *et al* on the role of suicidal behaviour among young immigrant women in the Netherlands. This is an issue that has attracted some attention in public policy debates and in the popular media over the years in a number of European countries. Drawing on detailed research on 115 case studies of South Asian, Turkish and Moroccan young women that authors explore the ways in which questions of family, religion and culture are interlinked with wider social processes in shaping patterns of suicidal behaviour. In exploring this issue the paper also goes on to suggest that there is a need to rethink Durkheim’s classic account of ‘fatalistic suicide’ in today’s social and cultural environment.

The next paper by Zareena Grewal focuses on research in North American Mosques that serve communities from Arab and South Asian backgrounds. Grewal’s account provides a nuanced insight into the ways in which colour, race and class play an important role in choices of marriage partner’s among Muslim Americans. Contrasting the attitudes of parents and their children the paper suggests that questions of colour and race are experienced differently across the generations and that in specific contexts religion may provide a space for negotiating conflicting visions of the ideal marriage partner.

The paper by Amy Lutz and Stephanie Crist has a somewhat different focus, analysing the issue of bilingualism among the children of Latino/a immigrants to the United States. Drawing on detailed empirical research about both boys and girls Lutz and Crist set out

to explore the ways in which family relations, gender and language intersect to shape the differential educational performance of Latino/a children.

The final paper in this issue is by Uvanney Maylor and it focuses specifically on the ways in which constructions of the idea of blackness are made and re-made in specific work and social environments. Maylor's account draws on original research in an educational environment to explore how black is a social construction that is imbued with specific meanings as a result of the ways in which racial identities and politics are inscribed with meaning through both individual and collective experiences.

Taken together the eight papers we have included in this themed issue provide important insights into the complex intersections of gender, race and religion in contemporary multicultural societies. They are also suggestive that there is a need for more sustained conceptual and empirical research on this field. As this research develops, we would welcome the submission of more papers that seek to enhance our understanding of these issues.

MARTIN BULMER

University of Surrey

JOHN SOLOMOS

City University London

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